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NIO/USSR

THREAT OUTLOOK -- 18 December 19841. Soviet leadership

Gorbachev has bounced back strongly after his low at the time of the October Plenum on agriculture.

He's back to previous protocol standing and routinely touted in private as the intended heir.

Privately described as the "second secretary" (not a formal post), his activities comport with the role of top deputy to Chernenko and often acting General Secretary.

Public and privately reported activities indicate a wide span of responsibilities: foreign affairs, ideology, industry, agriculture, and foreign trade.

The UK visit is gaining him a lot of (possibly dangerous) publicity. He'll go to France in February.

East Europeans are beginning to position themselves for his eventual elevation.

Gorbachev is vulnerable to overplaying his hand. His great caution on the substance of policy, e.g., in an anodyne speech on ideology, and his frequent [REDACTED] citation of Chernenko as authority for what he says reveal his own awareness of this. Much Western speculation about his standing has a life of its own. Some of his exposure could be used against him.

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Whether or not succession plans are firmly in place, there appears to be a relatively stable arrangement among the leaders for the time being.

We are getting more reports of an early (fall 1985) 27th CPSU congress preceded by publication (spring 1985) of the new party program. This will be the period in which Gorbachev succeeds, or tries and fails, to nail down the top job, while Chernenko is enjoying his last hurrah. 1985 will be a very sporty year inside the Kremlin.

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